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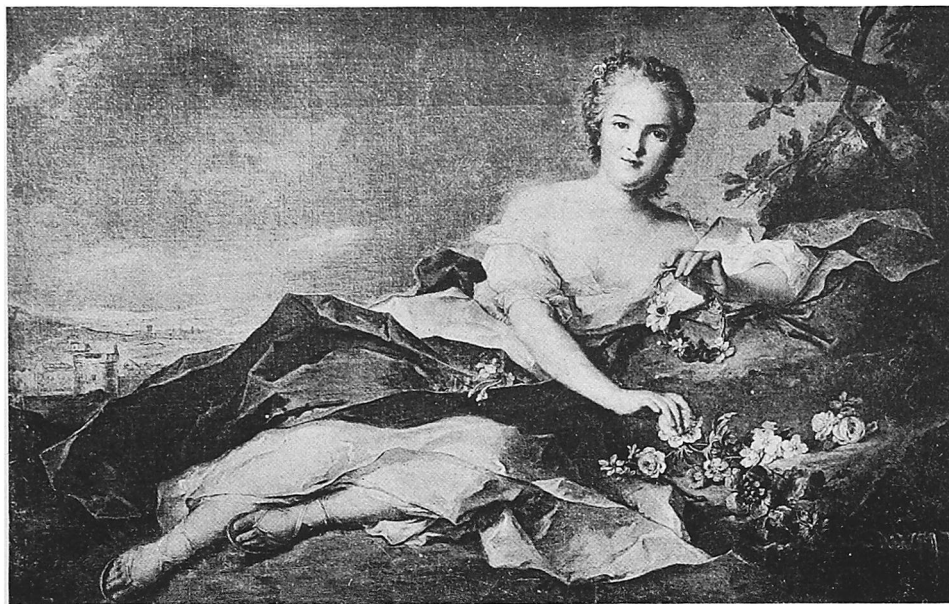
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HENRIETTE DE FRANCE
By NATTIER

Musée de Versailles

Interesting Portraits at Versailles

By AGNES HITCHCOCK

Il contient tant de passé, ce Versailles, qu'on l'y reveille-partout au moindre appel.

PIERRE DE NOLHAC.

I have found that the Portrait was a small lighted Candle by which the Biographies could for the first time be read, and some human interpretation be made of them.

CARLYLE.

THE fascination of the past, to which the present progressive age is so oddly responsive, is apt to seize on the least imaginative visitor to Versailles. If, as we approach it from the station, the chateau, a "huge heap of littleness" is at first sight but a jumbled mass of masonry, what is its lack of symmetry but a standing monument of the Grand Monarque's obstinacy in refusing to sacrifice his father's hunting-box to his architect's designs? That little rose-pink building, with its high-pitched roofs, its gilded balconies and crum-

bling decorations, set in the midst of the vast stone palace which stretches its interminable wings to the right and left of it, was, and still is, the very heart of Versailles, as it was, for nearly a century, of France itself. Here were the King's own rooms, communicating with the great *Galérie des Glaces*, the *Salles de la Paix* and de la *Guerre* that formed the stately garden front which contrasts so oddly with the older portion of the palace. This bit at least of Versailles remains untouched.

Even the misplaced zeal of Louis Philippe



MADAME ADELAIDE, ENFANT
By GOBERT Musée de Versailles

left it unchanged, so that the Grands Appartements are even now no unfit setting for the gracious and stately figures that to some eyes have never ceased to inhabit them.

Louis XIV, bewigged, bejeweled, majestic, still passes with his train of courtiers through the *Galérie des Glaces*, Madame de Maintenon, hooded and cloaked, still steals at dawn down the narrow staircase, at the foot of which her coach waits to take her to mass at St. Cyr. The music and the laughter of Marie Antoinette and her friends still echo in the little salon behind her gorgeous bed-chamber, and, dimly seen through the autumn mists that shroud them, the Queen and her husband stand on the balcony above the *Cour de Marbre*, and look down on the furious crowd below. These are some of the great figures of history that the most unlettered can hardly visit Versailles without recalling. There are other and less important personages, insignificant even in their own day; yet quite as closely associated with the chateau in which they

were born and lived, and in which some of them, the happiest, died; and the pictorial record of them is so interesting and so full that I am tempted to believe it may have as much attraction for other visitors to Versailles as it has had for myself. "They fill a much larger place in Versailles now than they did in life," a writer of our own day says, and says truly of Mesdames de France, whose portraits by Nattier, Drouais, and Madame Labille-Guiard occupy no inconsiderable space in the "*Nouvelles Salles*" on the ground floor, where Mesdames spent the greater part of their dull lives, and where Monsieur de Nolhac has now gathered together, and arranged, so many fine examples of eighteenth century portraiture.

"Clumsy, plump old wenches" an English visitor to Versailles called the four surviving daughters of Louis XV when he saw them there in 1766. The eldest of them, Madame Adelaide, was then barely thirty-four, but to be thirty-four and unmarried was to be old and contemptible in the eighteenth century. The opinion of France and of most European countries about Mesdames probably differed little from that expressed with such scant civility by Horace Walpole. Their beauty, unquestionably, had been short-lived, but representations, more or less faithful, of them, as they passed from infancy to the borders of old age, are still here to show that, in youth at least, they had had their share of attractions.

Earliest in date are the portraits of the twin sisters, *Madame Louise-Elizabeth* and *Madame Henriette*, the two eldest children of Louis XV and Marie Leczinska. Painted at the age of three or four by Gobert, they are a fascinating little pair in the long, straight frocks, the lace bibs and aprons, and the round lace caps nearly hiding the hair, that were worn by children of four as by women of forty. The chubby faces and the round brown eyes are so exactly alike that it would be vain to speculate which of the two is the future Madame Infante, if she were not already marked out

for her fate by the dove which she holds, an emblem of the peace the nation hoped to secure by her marriage to an Infant of Spain. A little further down the room is a portrait by the same artist of a third child, strongly resembling the twins, but with a look of greater vitality and animation. She is painted too in brighter colors than her sisters. Her stiff little frock, half veiled with lace, is of a more brilliant blue; her round lace cap is more gaily trimmed with tiny flowers. Her cheeks are pinker, her brown eyes larger and darker, and there is a light of mischief in them that the open bird-cage by her side, from which one bird has already escaped, seems to explain. This is *Madame Adelaide, enfant*, Madame Troisième, who already, at five years old, has a will of her own, and no notion of acquiescing in the disabilities of her sex.

"Why should they wish for another Duc d'Anjou?" she asks, on hearing the lamentations over her brother's death. "Why should they not make me Duc d'Anjou? I should like nothing better."

She is only seven when she proves herself more than a match for the great enemy of Mesdames, Cardinal Fleury, who hangs next to her here, his red robes, in agreeable juxtaposition to her little blue frock. Kindly, benevolent old man as he looks, with his white hair and benign expression, there was no soft spot in his heart for his master's children. The sight of the Dauphin and the little Princesses, on their way to visit the Queen, or playing in the galleries, might enchant visitors to the chateau, but to him it was a daily reminder of unnecessary expenditure. "Mesdames," he said, "crowded Versailles," and at his suggestion all except the two eldest were to be sent to the Abbey of Fontévrault. But when the great lumbering coach, with the scanty escort, which was all Fleury's parsimony allowed, swung out of the gates, it held only the four youngest children, Victoire, Sophie, Félicité and Louise, the last still a baby in arms. Madame Adelaide had stolen a march

on the Cardinal, she had waylaid the King as he went to mass, and had so worked on his feelings that the edict of banishment, as far as she was concerned, had been revoked.

The impression of wilfulness given in the earlier portrait is strengthened in Nattier's charming representation of her, some six years later, as "*Diana*." The slight figure is only half reclining, it looks as if ready to spring to its feet, the little head is held proudly erect, the eyes have a direct fearless glance. The silver crescent of the goddess just shows above the lightly powdered hair, a tiger-skin crosses the breast, and the bow of the huntress is held in the left hand. This picture, which Monsieur de Nolhac qualifies as "unsigned but excellent," was painted in 1745 as a pendant to the exquisite portrait, also by Nattier, of *Madame Henriette* as "*Flora*," which was originally placed in Marie Leczinska's private room. In neither case has the artist, already at the height of his fame, been tempted to use any of the well-known devices by which he



BELLE INFANTE ET MME. HENRIETTE,
ENFANTS
Musée de Versailles
By GOBERT



MADAME ADELAÏDE DE FRANCE
By NATTIER

Musée de Versailles

so embellished his sitters that every woman wanted to be painted by him. On the other hand, there is more of poetic fancy, especially in the details of the Flora, than we usually find in his nymphs and goddesses, with their conventional accessories.

Madame Henriette, in semi-classical draperies of virginal white and blue, lies by the side of a brook, on a bank covered with flowers, and the garland she weaves is of the wild roses of early summer. She has inherited the dazzlingly white skin that was in youth, one of Marie Leczinska's few beauties, and Nattier has not, as in a later portrait, touched the cheeks and the smiling lips with too vivid a carmine. There is a dreamy look in the sweet eyes, a happy future seems to open before the young princess. Her cousin, the Duc de Chartres, grandson of the Regent, has already ventured to speak of his hopes, and she has not been unwilling to listen. But the dream, as everyone knows, was not destined to be realized. A match that would strengthen the possible claims of the Orleans family to the throne would arouse the jealousy of Spain, and the Duc de Chartres must look

elsewhere for a bride. The Princesse de Bourbon-Conti, whose portrait, wrongly described as that of Madame de Pompadour, is in the next room, becomes his wife, and the mother of Philippe-Egalité; and Madame Henriette is left to console herself as best she may for the shattering of her castle in the air.

Of the four youngest Princesses at Fontévrault, little is heard at Versailles.

When the news comes

of the death of the little Félicité, at the age of eight, it is received with the calm resignation that befits the loss of a superfluous Princess. A few tears are shed for her by the good nuns as she is laid by the side of Richard Coeur de Lion in the tomb of the Plantagenets, but no mourning is worn for her, and the Queen, who is at Luneville with her father, the ex-King Stanislas, thinks it enough to give up her game of cards for one evening.

With all her virtues, Marie Leczinska does not appear to have been a very tender mother. Louis, with all his defects, was the more affectionate parent of the two. "It seems to me that my daughter Sophie is very weakly," he wrote to the Abbess of Fontévrault. "Although I hardly know her, I should be very sorry to lose her." Was it some fear of the kind, or some unwonted desire to please Marie Leczinska, that made him, in 1747, despatch Nattier on a secret errand to Fontévrault with orders to paint the three younger Princesses as he had already done their elder sisters? Nattier obeyed the command, but he did not pose his youthful sitters as nymphs or goddesses. Perhaps the

nuns objected to the classical draperies, perhaps the fashion was already dying out. Whatever prompted the choice of costume, the three portraits may be ranked among the best of his works. It would be difficult to find a more charming picture of girlhood than *Madame Victoire*, as he has represented her at the age of fifteen. The dull days at Fontévrault are nearly at an end, the light of expectation shines in the beautiful dark eyes, and the clear olive skin glows with health. The abundant dark hair is unpowdered, the rounded youthful form is shown to advantage by the richly embroidered gray dress and the yellow scarf that crosses it from left to right. Decidedly the beauty of the family, *Madame Victoire*, is much admired on her return to Versailles, though there are not wanting critics to say that, in spite of her beauty, "she walks badly and does not know how to curtsy."

Hardly less delightful is the companion portrait of *Madame Sophie*. Known in later life as the plainest and most insignificant of Louis XV's daughters, she must never-



MME. VICTOIRE DE FRANCE FILLE DE
LOUIS XV Musée de Versailles
By NATTIER



MADAME LOUISE
By NATTIER

Musée de Versailles

theless have had her moment of beauty. Madame Campan speaks of her in middle life as "quite extraordinarily ugly," but Madame de Pompadour, who was at least as keen an observer, and perhaps a better judge, found much to admire in her when she first returned from Fontévrault. Her face is longer and thinner than Madame Victoire's, her coloring less brilliant, her expression anxious rather than joyous. But though the eyes have already "the timid sideway glance like a hare" described by Madame Campan, there is great sweetness in them, and the refined, sensitive face is the index of a gentle, unselfish character. Nattier has posed her with her head slightly on one side, and holding with her right hand the light veil that falls from her hair. A garland of flowers, into which the artist has managed to introduce some touches of his favorite blue, crosses the pointed embroidered bodice from right to left.

In the portrayal of the third and youngest sister he had a harder task. Small for her years, and slightly deformed by a fall in infancy, *Madame Louise* was an unpromising



MARIE LECZINSKA REINE DE FRANCE
By NATTIER Musée de Versailles

subject for his courtly brush, and he did not scruple to call to his aid certain of his well-known artifices. He has made the large head—too large for the fragile form—smaller; he has straightened the crooked figure, and although he has left the look of delicacy, almost of suffering, he has not allowed it to detract from the childish charm of the future Carmelite. He has represented her in the shade of the Convent garden, with the walls of the Abbey just discernible in the background. There is nothing conventual, however, about her gay little dress of rose-colored satin, striped with green and white, its bodice and sleeves almost covered with lace. A pale pink carnation and a few pearls are in the powdered hair, in one hand she holds a basket of flowers, and in the other a blossom which she seems about to offer to the spectator.

Marie Leczinska, who declared that the two elder princesses were “really hand-

some,” reserved her chief admiration for the portrait of the third. “I have never seen anything so pleasing as the little one,” she wrote to her confidante, the Duchesse de Luynes. “She has a touching expression, far removed from sadness; it is pathetic, gentle and intelligent.” The secret of the artist’s errand had been well kept, and the Queen, going to visit the King at Choisy, where, knowing her tastes, he had promised her “a good dinner, Vespers and Benediction,” had had no suspicion of the surprise he had in store for her. If she saw in it, for a moment, a sign of returning affection, she was quickly undeceived. Two days later she was back again at Fontainebleau, the place of all others she detested. Love of Nature had not yet been made fashionable by Rousseau, and poor Marie Leczinska, who had spent many wearisome months at Fontainebleau, in the years when the arrival in quick succession of the ten children she bore to Louis XV had doomed her to almost perpetual seclusion, wrote with bitter resentment of the rocks that were deaf to her woes. “They are so hard, too,” she complained, “I must arm myself; not with patience, the fight would be too unequal, the only thing is to make myself as invulnerable as they are.”

Neglected, injured wife though she was,



MARIE-JOSEPH DE SAXE DAUPHINE
By NATTIER Musée de Versailles

she does not look an unhappy or discontented woman in the portraits by Nattier and La Tour that hang in one of the smaller rooms of the ground floor at Versailles, and are probably better likenesses than the much bedizened effigies produced by Belle and by Vanloo in the early years of her married life. The gown of wine-red velvet, bordered with dark fur, in which Nattier has painted her, gives her a comfortable matronly dignity, and the little frilled lace cap of the 18th century, surely one of the prettiest headdresses ever invented for women, especially when veiled as it is here by the black lace scarf thrown over it, is a becoming frame for her unclassical features and rather faded complexion. The "bloom of her ugliness," as was said of another Queen, "has gone off," and we see her now as a gentle, sweet-faced woman, with a touch of humor in the small brown eyes and smiling mouth. So she may have looked when, her tedious day at an end, she sat surrounded by a small circle of friends in the apartments of the Duchesse de Luynes, listening to some bit of literary gossip, brought from the salon of Madame du Deffaud by President Hénault, or to some malicious anecdote, told to perfection, by Maurepas. Evenings there were, and perhaps not the least enjoyable, when the little society, elderly folk all of them, nodded in their arm-chairs and slept peacefully in company.

La Tour's pastel of the Queen in the Louvre, of which there is only a poor copy, very properly skied, at Versailles, is probably a still more faithful portrait. He has not sought to disguise the irregularity of the features, the short, rather retroussé nose, the small eyes and the network of lines around them. He has drawn his royal sitter as he saw her, a middle-aged woman in a frankly middle-aged toilette. Comfort rather than elegance has been aimed at in the short morning jacket with elbow sleeves, from which lace ruffles fall over the still beautiful hands. The black lace scarf over



MADAME HENRIETTE
By NATTIER

Musée de Versailles

the head is not gracefully disposed as in Nattier's portrait, but tied well over the ears in such a way as to suggest that the good Queen was thinking more of the icy draughts that swept through the chateau than of her personal adornment. Her face is that of a woman who has learnt not to expect too much of life. In her way, she was a philosopher. "One must make the best of such pleasures as one can have," she said, and she lived up to her theory. The pleasures of the table were not indifferent to her and she ate "avec une reflexion et un appetit bien soutenus." Had she been a Bourbon born, she could not have played a better knife and fork than she did to the admiration, sometimes to the astonishment, of onlookers. She wore with satisfaction the rich velvets and brocades sent to her by the King's command from Lyons, she played her nightly game of cavagnole with entire indifference to the boredom of her children, who were expected to play with her. These were her amusements, her occupations filled all the certain hours of her blameless days. She read serious books, of which unkind persons, the King among



MADAME ADELAÏDE QUATRIÈME FILLE
DE LOUIS XV Musée de Versailles
By NATTIER

them, said she did not understand a word. She painted innumerable pictures, laying on, as directed by her master, the colors he prepared, and when the time allotted to these more intellectual pursuits was over, she betook herself thankfully to her needlework, making garments for the poor as diligently as if her daily bread had depended upon it.

Death came more than once to the palace in the dreary years that followed the brilliant middle period of Louis XV's long reign. The Dauphin's first wife, the Spanish Infanta, came to Versailles in 1745, to die there only a year later. Tocqué has painted her, stiff, reserved, expressionless, in blue and white brocade, with ermine-lined velvet mantle spreading in wide folds about her. Her pale blue eyes, her complexion so fair as to be almost colorless, her red hair, heavily powdered to disguise its real color, gave her no claims to beauty. Uninteresting as she looks, she managed

to win her young husband's heart, and *Marie-Josèphe de Saxe*, the second Dauphine, had but a cold welcome when she arrived at Versailles only seven months after the death of her predecessor. No undue expectations had been aroused in her case. "Though not pretty, there is nothing repulsive about her face," was the best the French minister at Dresden could say, or thought it wise to say, about his future Queen. A beauty she was not, but it is a pleasant fresh-faced girl whom Nattier has painted in all the bravery of a wonderful white brocade gown, with gold embroidery of scrolls and leaves, and a brilliant design of cherries. Her fair hair, slightly powdered, is dressed rather high, and two long curls fall on her plump white shoulders. With her frank blue eyes and her fresh red and white complexion, she is, says Monsieur de Nothoc, who discovered this portrait in one of the garrets at Versailles, "still the German Princess, a little clumsy, a little over-florid, without the quiet charm with which La Tour's pencil will endow her a little later in the pastel in the Louvre." Nattier has done his best by her, as he did, according to his lights, by all his patrons. If he has not made her pretty, he has at least succeeded in conveying the candor that was one of her chief characteristics. Other qualities than frankness were needed in the position in which she found herself, and happily for her husband she possessed them. That she succeeded in turning his aversions into affection, in living on terms of closest friendship with her sisters-in-law, and in winning the respect and confidence of Louis XV, shows that far more than ordinary sweetness of disposition and strength of character lay beneath an exterior which even Nattier could not make other than homely. A late portrait of her, by Nivelon confirms this impression. Here the days of bridal splendors are long past, and the mother of the last three Bourbon Kings is richly but soberly attired in dark velvet and fur. Her complexion has lost its

freshness, her eyes their lustre, her features, always inclined to bluntness, have perceptibly thickened. Traces of past sorrow and of present anxiety are clearly to be seen on the pleasant sensible face.

Death has again been busy at Versailles, and the sunny rooms to which Marie-Josèphe came as a bride have been darkened more than once by his shadow. Madame Henriette, her first friend and counsellor, had been soon taken from her. One of the sudden inexplicable illnesses, before which the medical science of the day was powerless, had carried off the best-beloved of Louis XV's daughters in the flower of her youth. Rumors were heard of a broken heart. The Princess, it was whispered, had never recovered from the blow of her cousin's marriage. A less romantic but truer explanation lies probably in her use of certain remedies which, professing to clear the complexion, had fatally affected her health. To those who loved her, her death came as a bolt from the blue. All the incidents of the sudden illness with which, early in 1752, she was seized at the Trianon, the hasty return to Versailles, the summoning of all the faculty from Paris, the swift approach of death, the administration of the last sacraments at which the King himself assisted, the hurried departure of all the royal family to Trianon, almost before the last breath was drawn, must often have recurred to Marie Josèphe, as her eyes fell on the full-length portrait of the Princess, which now hangs again in its old place in the Grand Cabinet of the Dauphin. Madame Henriette is seen here not as nymph or goddess, but just as she may have appeared at one of the family concerts in which she had often taken part in this very room. Her magnificent red silk dress, embroidered with a large branching design in gold, is extended by a hoop; the long pointed bodice leaves the shoulders bare, but the slender arms are partially veiled with lace. The powdered hair, in which there is a little wreath of flowers, is

dressed close to the head. The cheeks are highly rouged, and there is a pathetic look in the soft dark eyes. Was it there, we wonder, in the numerous studies the artist had made for the portrait, many months before the Princess' death, or did the remembrance of her tragic fate influence his brush, as he finished his work long after the sweet eyes had looked their last on this world? Pressure, we know, had to be put upon him before he would go on with his work. Twelve days after Madame Henriette's death, the Queen wrote, urging the completion of the portrait, but it was not until 1754 that it was finished, and hung in Madame Adelaide's apartment at Versailles, where the King came to look at it several times a day. "I have lost the joy of my life," he wrote to his son-in-law in the first moments of his grief, nor was the blow softened by the knowledge that the nation regarded it as a judgment upon him. "See what it is to offend God and to make the



LOUISE ELIZABETH DE FRANCE,
DUCHESS OF PARMA FIRST DAUGHTER
OF LOUIS XV
BY NATTIER
Musée de Versailles



L'INFANTE MARIE—ISABELLE PETITE
FILLE DE LOUIS XV Musée de Versailles
By NATTIER

people wretched," the Parisians cried, as the funeral procession passed to St. Denis. "God has taken away from him the daughter he loved best." Whether the portrait now at Versailles is the original, or the replica made of it by Nattier for the Dauphine, is a matter on which experts are still at variance.

The companion portrait of Madame Adelaide in the same room was not painted until 1758. The Princess, in sapphire blue velvet bordered with dark fur, sits with a music book on her lap, and her right hand raised as if beating time. A little white dog plays with a loose sheet of music at her feet. This is not the original by Nattier, but one of those "répétitions du Cabinet du Roi" which were constantly being executed for members of the royal family and for foreign courts. It is a far less interesting representation of *Madame Adelaide* than another and smaller portrait, also by Nat-

tier, dated two years earlier and unquestionably one of his best. Nowhere has he displayed his skill in the rendering of textures better than in this delightful rose-colored satin gown with its transparent over-dress of gauze embroidered with silver moons and stars. A pink ruche encircles the slender throat, and a little pink wreath rests on the powdered hair. "Madame Adelaide faisant des noeuds," is the official description of the picture, and in the absence of any other indication would almost establish its date. Knotting was just then the rage. No woman of fashion was seen without one of the gold, or silver, or mother-of-pearl shuttles that the work demanded, and a dainty knotting-bag that matched or contrasted with her dress. Statesman of the family, as Madame Adelaide liked to think herself, she did not disdain to follow a fashion that showed to advantage her taper fingers and delicate hands. Has Nattier flattered her in other respects? She is now twenty-four, not regularly beautiful, but still far from unattractive. The brown eyes of the child have become a light hazel, there is no softness, but a good deal of shrewdness in their direct determined glance. The imperious air of the youthful Diana is intensified in this later portrait. Madame Adelaide, who has succeeded to the place of Madame Henriette in the court and in her father's affections, is inclined to be something of a despot in the family circle. Even to the King she is beginning to say: "We will do this and that," instead of "Is it your pleasure, sire, that it shall be done?" Sometimes she goes too far, and one of the little notes in which it was Louis' custom to convey a command or administer a snub, comes to her, withdrawing the privilege he had granted her of coming to his rooms unannounced. He had installed her in a fine apartment (now only to be seen by special permission) on a level with his own, and had had it magnificently fitted up and decorated for her. The music room, especially, panelled with exquisite woodcarving

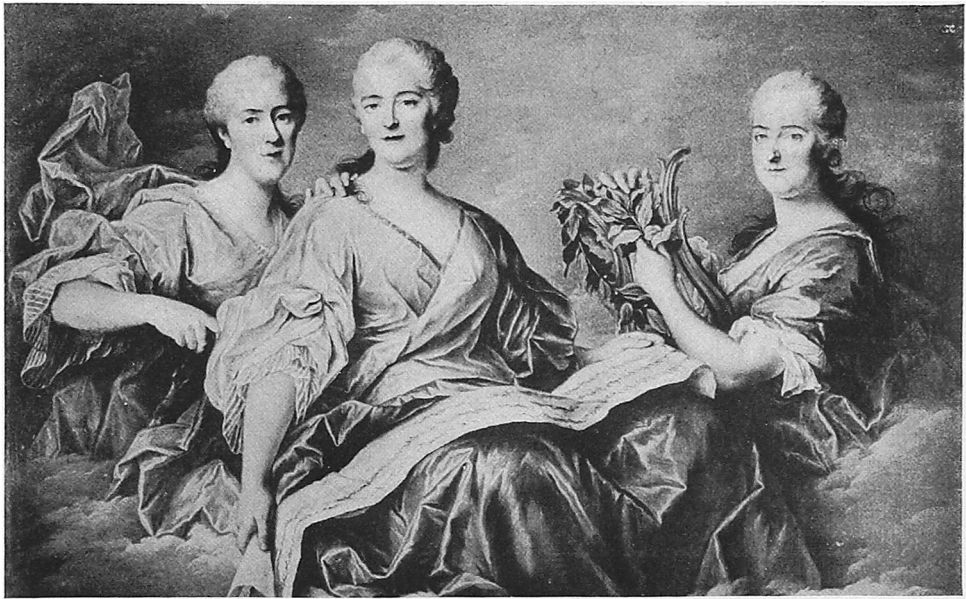
by Verbeckt, into which various musical instruments are introduced, still testifies to one of the chief interests of its occupant and her sisters. Concerts in the Dauphin's rooms in which all the Princesses took part were fairly frequent. Madame Adelaide herself had a powerful voice, almost as deep as that of her brother the Dauphin. She played the violin passably, and Madame Victoire was a good performer on the clavichord.

Encouraged by their brother, Mesdames tried to make up for their lack of education in earlier years. They read history, literature, and even philosophy, in which it may be conjectured they did not make much progress. They studied Italian under Goldoni, and learnt to speak it fluently, little guessing how useful an acquisition it would prove to them later. But even with these resources they must often have found life at Versailles intolerably dull. They had no country house of their own to which they could escape from the tedious formalities and publicity of the court, and the magnificent gardens of Versailles and Fontainebleau gave them little pleasure. The King, encouraged by Madame de Pompadour, might play at gardening and spend thousands of francs on a single bulb, Mesdames, who loved flowers, were allowed to cultivate a few plants in their own rooms, but nowhere else. Traveling, except in the nature of a state progress, was out of the question. Twice indeed Mesdames Adelaide and Victoire went to drink the waters at Plombières, and their grandfather, the ex-King Stanislas, Duke of Lorraine, fêted them to his heart's content at Luneville. The Princesses, who took a childish delight in the illuminations, fireworks, and decorations which greeted them in every little town on their route, would gladly have repeated these journeys, but the expense of them was too great to be faced. How could money be found for the pleasures of Mesdames while the treasury was being drained by Madame de Pompadour to provide new

amusements for the unamusable King? Louis, whose yawns were the despair of his court, must be diverted at all costs, while his daughters ate their hearts out in the little sunless back rooms looking on narrow, dingy courtyards that were their sole refuge from the motley crowd of sight-seers, "princes of the blood, cordons bleus, housemaids and the Lord knows who or what," with whom the state apartments were filled. Visits to Paris were comparatively rare—but now and again Mesdames went to the wonderful curiosity shop in the rue St. Honoré, where the King bought the silver-gilt spirit lamps and saucepans for his cooking experiments in the attics of Versailles, and Madame de Pompadour the Chinese screens and lacquered cabinets that were her latest whim in the perpetual replenishing of her wares. Mesdames were not able to spend such sums as the favorite disbursed on the porcelain monsters and lustres of rock crystal that we find entered to her account in the day book of the famous shop, but no doubt they spent some



PORTRAIT DE MME. ELISABETH DE FRANCE
Musée de Versailles
By VIGÉE LE BRUN



MESDAMES FILLES DE LOUIS XV, LOUISE, VICTOIRE, SOPHIE
By ÉCOLE DE DROUAI

Musée de Versailles

happy hours in ransacking its treasures when they visited it in two successive Decembers and bought "corbeilles à jour," "compotiers à coquilles" and other lovely objects as New Year's gifts for their friends.

Permanent emancipation from their narrow circle seemed impossible. If there had been any thought of marriage for them, it had been early abandoned. But it is doubtful whether Louis ever seriously entertained any project of the kind. Fleury had set his face against any repetition of the enormous outlay that had attended Madame Infante's marriage. "Enough," he said, indignantly, "had been spent in her trousseau to marry all the Princesses put together." And it must be confessed that in other respects Madame Infante's example was not encouraging. An apt pupil of her mother-in-law, Elizabeth Farnese, into whose hands she had been delivered at the age of thirteen, she was never weary of pressing her own and her husband's claims upon her father. Her position as wife of a younger son was in her eyes utterly unworthy of

her, the eldest daughter of France, and even when the Duchy of Parma had been given to her husband, she was continually scheming to have it exchanged for the throne of Naples or of Poland. Louis may be forgiven if he also felt that one married daughter was enough. Yet he welcomed her visits to Versailles, and never hinted, as some of his ministers did, that they were too long. No portrait of her is to be found there between that by Cobert, already described, and one that Nattier painted of her in 1752, on her second visit to her home after her marriage. Compared with those of her sisters, it shows that less than her fair share of good looks had fallen to her lot and the artist has been at no pains to disguise the fact. Nevertheless, it is one of the most interesting portraits in the collection. *Madame Infante* in hunting-dress is resting at the foot of a tree, during some pause, apparently, of the chase. Her three-cornered hat, with its hard line across the brow, is not becoming to the broad rather swarthy face, nor does the dark green riding coat, heavily trimmed with gold, lend

grace to the clumsy figure. "If she is as stout as this at fifteen," Elizabeth Farnese had written ten years before, "what will she be like at twenty-five?" and Nattier has supplied the answer. But the broad face is full of expression, and the brown eyes alight with intelligence. Madame Infante has seized the moment, it seems, of some interruption in the day's amusement, to turn to the subject nearest her heart. Her gloves are in her left hand, her right is raised as if to emphasize some point in her discourse, to press home some consideration of policy on a—possibly—unwilling hearer. It is one of the rare instances in which Nattier has chosen a characteristic rather than a conventional pose for his sitter. How characteristic it is the memoirs of the time testify. No stone was left unturned by Madame Infante to gain her ends. She spent hours at her writing-table, she sought interviews with her father whenever he would grant them; she interviewed ministers in her own apartment; she was willing to be on friendly terms with the Pompadour if so she could secure her influence with the King. Ever plotting and ever restless, she wore herself out before her time. Smallpox, peculiarly fatal to her family, attacked her on one of her visits to Versailles and she died there in 1759, at the age of thirty-two. The state portrait of her, which Nattier was commanded to paint after her death, hangs in the same room as that of Madame Henriette. She is gorgeously dressed in white and gold brocade, a blue velvet train embroidered with gold fleur-de-lis and lined with ermine, falls in sumptuous folds about her, her crown is on a console table at her side. Nattier has surrounded her with all the emblems of the sovereignty on which her heart had been set. On the face he has bestowed less care. The heavy features and brown skin are rendered without any attempt at embellishment, the eyes are dull and expressionless, with no hint of the intellectual vigor that is so subtly indicated in the fine portrait of "Madame Infante à la

Chasse." The artist was nearing the end of his own career. He was, as it proved, painting his last portrait, and his hand, we may surmise, had lost a little of its cunning. It is a relief to turn from this lifeless, uninteresting effigy of the Duchesse de Parme to the charming portrait of *Marie Isabelle*, also by Nattier, of the little daughter on whose behalf she had written reams of letters, and pulled every string within her reach. "Isabelita," as her mother fondly called her, is a model of childish dignity, a miniature court lady in all but the train. Her white silk dress, brocaded in red and gold, and deeply flounced with gold lace, stands out as stiffly as the hoops of her Spanish ancestresses painted by Velasquez. The rich lace on her small apron, on her pointed bodice, and on the handkerchief she holds in one tiny hand, is all of heavy Spanish point. A wreath of flowers crowns the powdered hair, dressed in exactly the same fashion as her mother's. The little face is curiously impassive. It is not sad, but it has none of the careless gaiety of childhood. Isabelita, not yet eight years old, has already learnt, in the words of an admiring courtier, "what she is and to whom she belongs." The clear childish eyes gaze calmly into a future already mapped out. Here, at least, Madame Infante's diplomacy had been successful. In the little Isabel we see the destined bride of the Archduke Joseph of Austria, the future Emperor. But the adored young wife did not live to share her husband's throne. "No one can take her place. There is no princess, no woman, like her," he wrote in the abandonment of grief when, in 1763, death snatched her from him after a few short years of happy married life.

Not far from the little Isabel hangs the portrait of another child, on whom even higher hopes were set—Louis-Xavier, duc de Bourgogne, the first born son of the Dauphin and Marie-Josèphe de Saxe, as we see him here, painted by Nattier at the age of four—is the most engaging of infant



ADELAÏDE DE FRANCE Musée de Versailles
By GUIARD

royalties. Plump, rosy-cheeked and smiling under the quaint feathered cap that nearly hides his flaxen curls, he is the very picture of health. A few years later and he is the pale, wasted invalid whom Fredou has sketched on the couch to which an accident at play has doomed him. The large wistful eyes, hollowed with suffering, look up from the pillow on which the fair head, covered with a lace cap, rests. The white satin coat, embroidered with arabesques of pink and green, the lace jabot, the blue ribbon of the Saint Esprit, crossing the breast, are lightly touched in, and kept subordinate to the haunting beauty of the eyes and the transparent pallor of the skin. A mere sketch in colored crayons, the work of an artist known only as a copyist in the Cabinet du Roi, the pathetic little portrait, as a critic of today has said, combines "the vigor of a La Tour, the tenderness of a Perronneau, and—borrowing from the future—

the anxiety of a Carrière." It hangs still in the room where Fredou drew it, and where the eyes of the Dauphine must often have rested upon it, after the child, her "cœur d'amour," had been taken from her.

As the years passed on, the roses faded in Mesdames' cheeks unperceived beneath the rouge, the brightness died out of their eyes, their hair turned gray beneath the powder. Drouais, or more probably, one of his pupils, has painted the three younger ones in the short period that intervened between the death of Marie Leczinska and the departure of Madame Louise from the court. He has gone back to the pseudo-classicism of a former day and represented the Princesses as Muses, seated among the clouds, and draped in a fashion that recalls some of Nattier's earlier works. Madame Victoire, holding a scroll of music, is in the center, with Madame Sophie on her right and Madame Louise, holding a lyre wreathed with laurels, on her left. There is a strong likeness between the three sisters; their faces have lengthened and sharpened; the Bourbon type of feature has become more marked. A far more pleasing impression is given by the portrait of Madame Sophie alone. Drouais has represented her in pale pink morning dress, striped and patterned with flowers, with lace lappets on the waved bands of unpowdered hair, just as she may have looked in the privacy of her own rooms, which she never willingly left. Nervous, delicate and painfully shy, she was little known outside her own family. Hating publicity in life, she dreaded it in death. "I beg that my funeral may be without any ceremony," she wrote to Madame Adélaïde, in 1782, the year she died. "I beg that there may be no service for me here. Have some masses said for me from time to time when you have a crown piece to spare."

Of Madame Louise there are no portraits at Versailles besides the two already mentioned. It is left to the imagination to picture her as in "the plainest clothes she

could muster—a dark silk gown, long cloak and bonnet with a pink top-knot,” she slipped away from Versailles, unknown to all but the King, and, presenting herself to the astonished nuns at Saint Denis, intimated that she intended to remain with them. Different views were taken then, and are still taken as to her action. Was she the saint that her biographers have represented her, or the soured, disappointed woman who, disliking her position under the thumb of a domineering elder sister, took the only way of escape open to her? Perhaps her own words, “Moi Carmélite, le Roi tout à Dieu,” reveal her true motive, and the hope that nerved her to the final effort. She was little missed at Versailles, where the deaths following quickly one upon another of the Queen, the Dauphin and his wife, had thrown Mesdames more than ever upon their ladies-in-waiting for companionship and sympathy. Outwardly the routine of their lives varied little from month to month and year to year. In its magnificence and ceremonial the court of Louis XV was still the court of Louis XIV. But it was no longer the center of fashionable life, it had become a by-word for dullness and tedium. Very soon it was enough for a fashion to be adopted at Versailles for it to be ridiculed in Paris, where for the moment frivolity was out of favor, and philosophy the rage. “Laughing is as much out of fashion as pantins or bilboquettes,” wrote Horace Walpole in 1765. “Good folks, they have not time to laugh. There is God and the King to be pulled down first, and men and women, one and all, are devoutly employed in the demolition.”

Such echoes of the *salons* as penetrated to Mesdames’ apartments filled them with pious displeasure, but with no serious apprehension. They were in the midst of a small circle of dependents, more bent on getting and keeping for themselves all that their mistresses had to give in money and influence than on opening their eyes to the

changes that were going on in the wider world outside. A younger generation, too, was growing up within the palace, and the childish illnesses of their orphaned nephews and nieces, the marriages already talked of for them, the appointments in their future households, were all matters of greater interest to Mesdames than reforms in the system of taxation, or the abolition of class privileges. The portraits of their brother’s children are still on the walls of the big room, where “Mesdames Tantes” must often have welcomed them, and brought out for their benefit the stores of sweetmeats and cakes which they kept in their cupboards behind the panelled walls. The Duc de Berri, a thin, long-faced boy, bearing little resemblance, except in the prominent eyes, to the future Louis XVI, is here between his two brothers, the Comte de Provence, with the self-satisfied complacent expression of the boy who is considered “the



VICTOIRE-MARIE-LOUISE-THERÈSE,
VICTOIRE DE FRANCE Musée de Versailles
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clever one of the family," and the Comte d'Artois, handsome and debonnair even as a child. A charming picture by Drouais shows Madame Clotilde, the future Queen of Sardinia, as a round-faced little girl in white frock and white lace cap, seated on a goat, which her brother, the Comte d'Artois, a gallant little figure in grey satin coat and lace ruffles, is leading. *Madame Elisabeth*, the youngest member of the family, is here also, painted by Drouais. She is evidently conscious of the importance of the occasion, as she sits for her portrait, a demure little maiden of six, in Quaker-like grey silk frock, lace apron and close cap tied under her chin. She holds in her arms a tiny pug dog, grey like her frock, and looking out of the canvas with eyes as round and solemn as her own. We look for some later representation of her, but it is more than doubtful whether the blue-eyed, brown-haired young girl painted by Madame Vigé Le Brun in the white muslin fichu and blue ribboned cap of the Trianon period, is an authentic portrait of the saintly Princess. Is it too much to hope that Monsieur de Nolhac, pursuing his researches in the garrets and lumber-rooms of Versailles, may some day light upon such another treasure as he has already discovered there in Nattier's beautiful portrait of the Dauphin, and that we may yet be privileged to see Madame Elisabeth as she looked in the happy days of her girlhood?

We have come to the last room in the long series—the room in the Angle du Nord, formerly known as the Salon of Madame Victoire. In early spring, with the scent of the lilacs in the breeze and the fresh green of the distant woods as a background to the brilliant coloring of the flower-beds, this many-windowed, spacious room with its wide views is, for all its northern aspect, cheerful and pleasant enough. But in autumn with the mists sweeping up from the valley, or, as I saw it last in midwinter with snow clouds low on

the horizon, the great salon, empty of all but pictures, has an indescribably desolate air. It was here that Mesdames spent their last hours at Versailles, here that even before the darkness fell on that dreary October afternoon they sat with all the long windows shuttered and barred, the great room lighted only by one feeble candle lest the shots fired at them in the morning should be repeated, and with surer aim. Here are the fine full-length portraits of *Madame Adelaide* and *Madame Victoire*, painted only a year or two earlier, and faithful likenesses, we cannot doubt, of them at this time. Madame Labille-Guiard, a good artist and no flatterer, shows them as elderly women, stately and dignified, but with little of the beauty of old age. On Madame Adelaide especially, the years have left their mark. Tall, and rather gaunt, in her rich dress of crimson velvet, opening over a petticoat of pearl gray satin and gold lace, she stands by an easel on which, enclosed in one frame, are the portraits in profile of Louis XV, Marie Leczinska and the Dauphin. Her eyes have the dimmed lifeless look of unexpectant middle age. They have wept much, but their bitterest tears have still to be shed. Her complexion is patchy and muddled, it has never lost the traces of smallpox contracted when nursing her father in his last illness. Her hair, gray under the powder, is much frizzed beneath widespread loops of white ribbon and lace, the "butterfly" head-dress of the moment. In the background of the room in which she is represented is a bas-relief, representing a figure half-lying, half sitting on a bed, at the foot of which are two weeping women whom attendants at the bedside are motioning away. The artist has sought to commemorate the devotion of Mesdames to their father on his deathbed, a devotion which seemed so misplaced that at the time it merely excited ridicule. None but his daughters mourned for the "Bien Aimé." The mocking shouts of *Taïaut, Taïaut*, in

imitation of his own harsh cry when hunting, with which the Parisians greeted his funeral procession, showed but too well the feeling of the capital at his death.

Madame Victoire, painted just a year later than her sister, has still the beautiful dark eyes of the Fontévrault portrait. Her abundant hair, elaborately frizzed under a butterfly head-dress like her sister's, frames a face still handsome, though an indolent life and a love of good things have robbed it of its oval contour. In its good-tempered, rather over-blown comeliness, it is a strong contrast to the elder sister's anxious grief-stricken countenance. No presage of the storm so soon to break has yet assailed Madame Victoire. She stands, still happy and prosperous, at the foot of a small altar, dedicated, according to a fancy of the time, to friendship. In one hand she holds a few wild flowers, poppies and cornflowers, suggestive of the passion for Nature which the Princess, not to be entirely behind the times, had lately developed. Lover of ease though she was, did she not once spend a whole summer night in her garden at Bellevue that she might see the moon set and the sun rise? "I was really delighted with the fine weather, the exquisite moon, the dawn and the beautiful sun," she wrote to her favorite lady-in-waiting, "and then with

my cows, sheep, and poultry, and with the stir of all the laborers who were gaily beginning their day's work." At Bellevue, given by the king to his aunts soon after his accession, the sisters had spent some of the happiest days of their lives, Madame Adelaide rejoicing in the scope it gave for her energies, and Madame Victoire in the freedom it afforded for seeing her friends. To Bellevue they were allowed to return on the melancholy day when the King with all his family left Versailles forever, and from Bellevue they took flight some fourteen months later and entered on the long years of exile which ended only with their death. But it is at Versailles that their memory is forever enshrined, at Versailles that we catch the echoes of their childish footsteps and their laughter, that we see them, young, radiant, richly dressed, "in the sun shining like suns," as they set forth on a state progress to Paris, or, grown older and more sedate, muffled in the black taffeta cloaks that hide a hasty toilette as they hurry through the Grands Appartements on their daily visit to the King, or again, on that grey October morning, as, dignified and undismayed with gracious words to the guards surrounding their coach, they drive through the great gates into an unknown and threatening future.

